

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, MARR, KS

SUBJECT: ROK PRESS REACTION TO SPEAKER CHONG'S CALL ON PRESIDENT
DENT

REF: SEOUL 3258

SUMMARY: SPEAKER CHONG IL-KWON'S CALL ON PRESIDENT FORD WAS TOP STORY IN MAY 9 ROK PRESS, WHICH HEADLINED NEWS THAT PRESIDENT HAD CONFIRMED US WOULD KEEP SECURITY COMMITMENT TO ROK AND WOULD DO ITS BEST TO SPEED MODERNIZATION PLAN. EDITORIALS CONTINUED TO EXPRESS SATISFACTION WITH REAFFIRMATION OF US ROLE BUT NOTED THAT CONGRESSIONAL INTENTIONS LESS CERTAIN. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS BASED ITS ACCOUNTS OF FORD-CHONG MEETING ON REMARKS REPORTEDLY MADE BY CHONG AND AMBASSADOR HAM PYONG-CHUN IN PRESS CONFERENCE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THEIR CALL ON PRESIDENT. ACCORDING TO STORIES, CHONG SAID HE HAD TOLD PRESIDENT THAT IF US FORCES WERE WITHDRAWN FROM KOREA NORTH KOREA WOULD ATTACK WITHIN SIX MONTHS. HAM, AGREEING WITH THIS VIEW, SAID PRESIDENT HAD ASSURED CHONG THAT US HAS NO INTENTION OF WITHDRAWING ITS TROOPS AND THAT "HIS ADMINISTRATION WILL STAND BY ITS SECURITY COMMITMENTS TO THE ROK."

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HAM ALSO TOLD PRESS THAT PRESIDENT HAD PROMISED TO DO

HIS BEST TO SPEED MODERNIZATION OF ROK MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AFTER CHONG HAD POINTED OUT TO PRESIDENT THAT MOD PLAN IS BEHIND SCHEDULE DUE TO CONGRESS' RELUCTANCE TO FUND IT.

2. CHONG TOLD REPORTERS THAT PRESIDENT HAD TOLD HIM THAT LOSS OF SOUTH VIETNAM SHOULD NOT UNDERMINE CONFIDENCE IN THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO ROK. HAM REPORTEDLY ADDED TO PRESS THAT HE BELIEVES PRESIDENT AIMED HIS WORDS AT NORTH KOREA AS A DECLARATION THAT US WOULD STAND BY ROK TODAY AS IT DID IN 1950.

3. HAM ALSO EXPRESSED VIEW THAT NEITHER PRC NOR USSR WISHES NORTH TO INVADE AT THIS TIME, ALTHOUGH NORTH MIGHT ATTACK ANYWAY. HE TOLD PRESS THAT NORTH ATTACK MIGHT BE STOPPED WITHOUT USE OF US AND HE SAID THAT IT IS NOT NUMBERS BUT PRESENCE OF US FORCES THAT IS IMPORTANT IN DETERRING NORTH.

4. EDITORIALS IN TONGA ILBO AND GOVERNMENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE KOREA HERALD CONTINUED HOPEFUL REACTION TO US ASSURANCES OF RECENT DAYS (REFTEL) BUT POINTED OUT GENTLY THAT US IS AT CROSSROADS BETWEEN INVOLVEMENT AND ISOLATIONISM. TONGA URGED US TO FULFILL COMMITMENT TO MOD PLAN. HERALD SAID THAT PRESIDENT FORD'S ASSURANCES POINT IN RIGHT DIRECTION AND AGREED THAT US FAILURE IN INDOCHINA IS NOT END OF US ROLE IN WORLD, BUT NOTED THAT ATTITUDE OF CONGRESS IS OF KEEN CONCERN TO KOREA AND URGED CONGRESS NOT TO CURB OR REDUCE US COMMITMENTS TO ITS ALLIES.

5. COMMENT: READING OF ROK PRESS LAST FEW DAYS GIVES DEFINITE IMPRESSION THAT KOREANS BELIEVE US CAN BE COUNTED ON TO FULFILL SECURITY COMMITMENT DESPITE INDOCHINA. AMBASSADOR HAM'S "INSTANT ANALYSIS" OF MEETING WITH PRESIDENT FORD APPEARS TO BE MORE DIRECT ROKG EFFORT TO EMPHASIZE US ASSURANCES AND ALLAY FEARS OF A KOREAN INDOCHINA.
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